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# USSR Report

POLITICAL AND SOCIOLOGICAL AFFAIRS

BURLATSKIY TV PLAY ON GORBACHEV REFORMS



FOREIGN BROADCAST INFORMATION SERVICE

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[Transcript of play by Fedor M. Burlatskiy: "Two Views From One Office"]

[Text] "Two Views From One Office"

Streshnev: Thank you for coming, Vasilii Romanovich. I didn't really expect to see you. I thought you'd ignore my request. Come in. Will you have some tea?

Shirokov: Tea? Sounds good, I won't refuse tea.

Streshnev: Fine, sit down. Let's have some tea. How come you said so forcefully at the session "at his own request"? After all, you know I've been working away here day and night for 10 years filling in for the first secretary and doing his job for the last 6 months. We've been friends for so many years. We worked in the gorkom together. You didn't warn me. It was like a bolt from the blue... It's not as if we're strangers. Remember we lived together in one room at the academy. Together we mulled over scientific problems. Did you get carried away in the heat of the moment?

Shirokov: Maybe I did, maybe I didn't. I came here Vanya feeling good in the knowledge that you were here. There was someone to lean on.

Streshnev: But how did I fail to live up to your expectations? I greeted you properly and didn't show any annoyance at not being kept on. Isn't that true?

Shirokov: From the personal angle, that seems to be so. In this respect, Ivan, I have no complaints about you. But you amazed me, to say the least, the way you behaved at the bureau session. You seemed like someone else, a different person. But here, Ivan, we'll be speaking frankly.

Streshnev: Were you given advice in Moscow? Were some hints dropped about me? From some authority? Speak to me frankly as to a friend.

Shirokov: No hints were dropped from any authority. They simply said to take a close look. To take a look at the cadres and make suggestions.

Streshnev: Take a look... Did they just now notice!

Shirokov: Don't worry. There were no instructions about you.

Streshnev: What's the matter then? What made you so wound up? Was it that incident?

Shirokov: Incident? That was the word you used at the bureau session. A man's life was simply lost! A worthy, honored person, a war veteran. He worked for 40 years at the same plant. And then he perished.

Streshnev: No, he didn't perish. He simply died from a heart attack.

Shirokov: This must still be investigated. What did the prosecutor say? There are suspicions it was suicide.

Shreshnev: Suspicions? Why was he silent before? He never used to open his mouth, but suddenly he began getting uppity, of all things.

Shirokov: Maybe he did. You're in a better position to judge. But I can't understand why you didn't pay any attention to the note which was left by the deceased.

Shreshnev: There wasn't anything special in the note. "They have deceived me again..." And who deceived him? His daughter, the mean bitch. She neglected the poor man, waiting for him to die so that she could get her hands on the dacha. What am I guilty of? And you, Vasya, do you think I deceived him?

Shirokov: We deceived him, Ivan. We made promises, and because the old man started selling flowers without a permit, we took him to court.

Streshnev: A law is a law, one for all. Its the same for the veterans. We act by decrees

Shirokov: A decree is written for the wise. A decree is issued to remove the sick branches, and we go hacking away at the branches of a healthy tree. We chop the healthy tree down to the roots.

Streshnev: And for this, my longtime friend, you want to get me into trouble?

Shirokov: I don't want to get you into trouble. Not at all.

Streshnev: We needlessly dredged the question up at a bureau session. It doesn't belong at the oblast level; that was the mistake. We have 3 million people in the oblast. We can't deal with every single individual. It's beyond us.

Shirokov: So that's it... Having learned to count in millions, how can you see a real person? But it is not just an old man who was refused. Two-thirds of the gardeners were refused permits. They were banned from shipping vegetables outside the oblast. And half the vegetables rotted where they grew. The militia was sent in to smash the greenhouses on the plots. What is this, vandalism or thoughtlessness? What is it?

Streshnev: Come on now, it's not vandalism! Our militia doesn't even know the meaning of the word. It operated according to the Decree on the Struggle Against Unearned Income. True, maybe they went a bit far, and they need to set it right. But why make an issue of it?

Shirokov: That is what we are doing, setting them right! An individual goes a bit too far and then we have to set things right. This goes on a whole lifetime. And always within the limits... Why didn't you report the excess to Moscow? That the ranks are depleted, that here working people are not treated right. This is your chief responsibility.

Streshnev: You know why I haven't? They don't expect such truth from us. They don't expect it. Truth can come only from the top downward. Hardly from the bottom upward. I phoned and reported that "isolated instances have occurred."

Shirokov: Yes, yes, so you reported that "isolated instances have occurred." You reported only part of the truth. As people say today, a half-truth. So what's the other half, a half-lie? And what does this all add up to?

This is disinformation, that's what it is, deception or self-deception. And the result is you made no report, the next oblast refrained from doing so, and the result was a total distortion of the picture. It begins here, from our half-lies, from our poor reporting. We've fulfilled, overfulfilled--who are we kidding? Where do these slogans which are cut off from life come from? We imagine that everything is invented at the top: "Rapid Advance to Communism", "Advanced State of the Development of Socialism."

Shreshnev: Why are you suddenly jumping from an isolated fact to such generalizations?

Shirokov: There are facts and facts. It was from an isolated fact, a complaint by a Siberian peasant, that Lenin learned a lesson. He abolished assessments and introduced a tax in kind.

Streshnev: Well, so what's the lesson you and I must learn from the present excesses?

Shirokov: The lesson is that we must get to the heart of our relationship to initiative. Individual initiative--let's get to the heart of it. We do whatever we can to keep this initiative away from the public--only by order, only by decree, only by joint effort, only through collective initiative!

Streshnev: Nothing is bad about this. Collectively organized labor shows productive output. It's a fact.

Shirokov: Yes, organized. But it shouldn't be ordered. If the person himself shows interest in what he does, then he will put his heart into his work. Not so that it has to be necessary. For whom is it necessary? Not for him, not for the collective. For whom is it necessary? It's necessary for both of us! That's for whom it's necessary.

Streshnev: It's necessary for the state. We heard the work necessary as an order.

Shirokov: Yes, that's so. But it's necessary that the state recognize and value the services of each worker. Then personal responsibility will emerge. Let's take a writer for instance. You can't say that his poetry should be written collectively or according to order. Or an inventor? True, that's another matter. If he doesn't work in the organization, he must move mountains and break his back to make his mark. And artists? Why are almost all Russian industries going to wrack and ruin?

And doctors? Why are they turning into cold-hearted statisticians? And scientists? Why are they carelessly carrying out collective work? Because they have been deprived of individuality. And those garden hobbyists? With one hand we help them and with the other we strike at them. In the past we had adequate transportation for various needs. But now, what's to be done? How do we get lumber, bricks? How? And how long is this situation going to continue? We make machines..., but there are no spare parts; televisions break down, and there is no place to repair them. Where is the human touch? It's not human. If there is a problem it has to be solved. There is no other way. It must be solved.

Streshnev: True, in principle this is all very good. But it won't be as easy as you think to solve this problem. The decree is oriented to combat easy money. I realize that you're sympathetic and that you think the old man was harmless... But he grew his little flowers and then sold them. For how much though? Did you try to find out? You wouldn't get a hydrangia for 50 kopecks. You wouldn't even get one for 3 rubles.

Shirokov: What's to be done then?

Streshnev: Ban it, that's what!

Shirokov: No, what I'm asking is what's to be done about the flowers?

Streshnev: Flowers?



Shirokov: Yes, flowers. You want a city without flowers? There are enough restrictions here. But what is the situation regarding permits? How many new cooperative stores, service workshops or public dining rooms have you set up in the last 6 months--1,000, 100, 10?

Streshnev: Just why are they pressing me? We didn't deal with this. There weren't specific instructions for this. Why take it on?

Shirokov: Come on, Ivan, you didn't want to deal with this. So you got involved in something else.

Streshnev: In what?

Shirokov: You read the Decree on the Struggle Against Unearned Income and jumped at it. I don't understand what you were so excited about.

Streshnev: I wasn't that excited. Its purpose was clear. Frankly speaking, more natural. If you allow it, everything can suddenly get out of hand, can start becoming unsteady.

Shirokov: In what way? Administratively?

Streshnev: Yes.

Shirokov: But not financially!

Streshnev: How could it not be? And this is social justice?

Shirokov: How do you understand it to be?

Streshnev: As the people understand it? The people, in case you don't know it, prefer equality in poverty to inequality in wealth. People above all don't like it when someone else lives better than they do.

Shirokov: Then this isn't justice. More precisely, this could be called social envy.

Streshnev: You've invented a new term.

Shirokov: It's not new, it's old. Its only been forgotten. One person says: "My neighbor lives better than I do. He works better. If I were to work better then I would earn more." That's fair. Each according to his labor. But another reasons differently: "My neighbor makes more than I do, so what does that make him? Does that mean he works better? Just what has this proved? Everyone must be made equal, everyone." Well, this is nothing more than a socially envious person. Let's say you and I are managers. Whom should we encourage? If we encourage the first type, we'll have a society of active individuals; if we encourage the second, a society of lazy bums. Isn't this true?

Streshnev: Well, cooperatives, individuals, merchants, no one will like it. Bear that in mind, Vasya.

Shirokov: But it's clear, it can be explained because up to now we have not eliminated what Lenin called trade involving bribery, trade based on crudity and deceit. So you say the price is high. Quite right. So who is to blame?

Streshnev: The speculator, that's who.

Shirokov: No, Ivan, you and I are also to blame.

Streshnev: Come on, Vasya!

Shirokov: Why is the price high at the market? It's clear... from shortages, and why are there shortages? From your bans, restrictions. If the oblast had 100 flower growers instead of just one, the price of flowers would drop to about 10 kopeks. The same for tomatoes, cucumbers, watermelons and for all produce.

Streshnev: All right, we screwed up with the old man. The situation regarding permits must also be straightened out.

Shirokov: Is that the only issue? Just tell me, what have you accomplished here lately? Just name anything important in the obkom's work. After all, 18 months have passed since the Central Committee April Plenum. You're still failing to fulfill the plans. We're not producing enough industrial goods. We're still fighting shortages... There are also problems with food. The stores have only bread, groats and sugar. Meat supplies are irregular and vegetables are rarely seen.

Streshnev: Frankly speaking, somehow I don't see major changes in neighboring oblasts. Big ideas, but little progress.

Shirokov: Come on, Ivan, at least don't lie to yourself. I listened to your speeches at the bureau sessions, and, to be honest, my impression was that I had gone 5 years back in time. You were so calm and collected in what you said and how you said it. Everything was normal; nothing particular going on. So where is your concern for things? The responsibility for your failures? Where is your party conscience?

Streshnev: Lay off! Leave our party spirit alone. We're ready to lay down our lives for the party, and you yourself know this.

Shirokov: I'm not speaking about this. Not about this! Your party doesn't need a war right now, it needs work, skilled, honest work. The party won't permit anyone right now to work the old way. This tendency is over. This you should understand with all your heart and with all your party-mindedness.



Streshnev: The old has been enlightened by 50 years of experience. You know you don't have to rush to throw out the old into the dump, not until something new has been formed.

Shirokov: You don't want to understand me, Ivan. Or you're not able to. You really don't want to. Perhaps you have gotten tired of all this, the empty ritual at meetings when we see you so dignified at the presidium. We listen to banalities which we ourselves have invented and we applaud at the necessary spots. Don't you really want to hear a humane word? Don't you feel what people want? What they want from a leader? It's an honest and frank discussion of the main and most urgent matters. Not reading from a prepared text, but talking in a human way, without any taboo subjects or areas closed to criticism.

Streshnev: Very well, say we were to have brought all these sore points out in the open. Who doesn't know about them: housing, shortages of goods, inadequate food supplies. What then? We'd only hand out promises on all sides. What would be the outcome? Nothing will have changed and we'd have only rocked the boat.

Shirokov: Once again you are fundamentally wrong. This is an old argument. We had it way back in the academy and we were not the only ones. Should a problem be brought out in the open or concealed? There are two approaches, two positions. If you've brought a problem out into the open, you have begun to solve it. If you've concealed a problem, you have refused to solve it. You are afraid to even think about it. Moreover, you are simply indifferent to human needs. Ivan, answer me, how do you yourself do your shopping now?

Streshnev: How? Like everyone else.

Shirokov: Really, like everyone else?

Streshnev: Well not quite like everyone else, but from an ordinary store. My wife goes with a chauffeur and places an order. Then, in the usual way, it's delivered.

Shirokov: And this chauffeur that you have--is this servant of yours a farm laborer? Why don't you go to the store yourself?

Streshnev: Go myself? You try chasing around here in my position, and you'll see whether you have a moment left to run around the stores...

Shirokov: Well, running or not, it would no do harm to actually drop in there. Then you'd see for yourself the difference between products delivered to you packed in a box and those on the shelves.

Streshnev: I hear reports almost everyday about food supplies and about the marketplace as well.

Shirokov: If it's reported, why do we tolerate it, and how long are we going to tolerate it?

Streshnev: Would you then have us encourage the private money-grabbers?

Shirokov: The private traders, you think we're encouraging them? Who is our private trader? Who, when we are all working for the state? The one who takes someone else's labor. That type is the private trader. He is a thief working for the state. But the individual who shows personal initiative--who earns money by the sweat of his brow and gives the profits to the state--does the state not need him? The state and the consumers?

Streshnev: Do you know how much a butcher makes at the market each day?

Shirokov: Well, so how much?

Streshnev: Why 150 rubles, that's how much.

Shirokov: And have you caught such a butcher?

Streshnev: No, not yet.

Shirokov: You haven't caught the butcher. But the old man was caught. And do you know why? I'll explain it to you. Because the old man was a working person, therefore out in plain view. The butcher is a thief and more difficult to catch. What is the result? The result is a complete distortion of the decree. You tell me: how many millionaires are there in the oblast?

Streshnev: Has anyone counted?

Shirokov: Yes, I received a report from the chief of the Struggle Against Embezzlement of Socialist Property and Speculation Department. There are 19. As for those who have hundreds of thousands, no one can count them. Their webs are spread in all directions and no one knows to whom they lead. You speak of easy money. But whom do you point to? The sparrow, not the hawk. The gardener, the kolkhoz member selling a crop from his private plot. Right?

Streshnev: I suppose so.

Shirokov: Yet they all work. At the academy not long ago an opinion poll was conducted. Builders and engineers participated, intelligent people. Some 114 days of the work year were spent on this poll. They worked evenings, Saturday, Sundays and holidays. How can this be considered unearned income? The fact is that it's not unearned income. Its overtime. These people gave up their rest. Their rest was given up!

Streshnev: Well, shouldn't this be allowed?

Shirokov: Of course it should. It's just necessary to regulate individual extra earnings so that taxes are paid on them, just as on regular income.

Streshnev: But why rely on non-state forms of activity?

Shirokov: Why should the state be made to shoulder all the so-called small enterprises--hairdressers' salons, street trade? The state has plenty of other tasks. If it still can't fully supply us with food and services, wider use must be made of people's initiative and of independent activity.

Streshnev: They'll get rich, and I don't like this. Nor will others like it, I believe.

Shirokov: You can't let feelings guide you to politics. If it is advantageous to the consumer and the producer, that's okay. Let them earn more... of course, under financial control.

Streshnev: But why should we encourage personal enrichment. Our way is to develop social funds and, first of all, invest money there.

Shirokov: Here, too, there is a problem which must be examined. Just look at who is studying at our best universities? How many "telephone scholars" are admitted as a result of telephone calls? The children of officials, are they any better than other children who are talented and hardworking? But how difficult it is for a new Lomonosov from Maritime Kray to get a place there! Take other benefits, for example, like vacations or medical treatment. Are they always dependent on their personal contribution? More often than not, benefits depend on which department you belong to. One can understand differences in pay, but the distribution of the public pie must be scrupulously fair.

Streshnev: When I listen to you, Vasilii, I think: Which one of us has lost touch with real life? You don't know over there in Moscow what's really happening in the entire country. You don't see the full picture. We're not to blame, Vasily, for how everything has turned out. Soviet power has given people everything. And how have they responded? How many of them still drink, steal, work any old way?

Shirokov: Enough, enough, stop it! Soviet power was given to them. It is they who are Soviet power.

Streshnev: And what do you represent, the democratic condition? This is a distortion of life.

Shirokov: We represent the people. We guide a common effort. We don't produce anything. We only organize, either well or badly. That's our job. And you say that people have begun to drink! Well, our own noses are not clean either.

Streshnev: Don't oversimplify. I think we'll solve all the problems. Any problem, easy or difficult, can be discussed with the people. For instance, the people spoke well at a warehouse. Listen to what they said.

Shirokov: I heard.

Shreshnev: They stood in line at this store.

Shirokov: Whether they stood in line or didn't stand in line, I don't know. But I heard it. I approached the line in the car. Someone spotted me, and he began to really talk. He said, "For 50 years you have been making the people drunk. You got money for industrialization by making people consume alcohol." Now, he says, "You want to deprive them of alcohol for the technical revolution." Here he turned to the people in line and asked, "Should people give up drinking?" And I said, "You have to ask your wife this question. They are the mothers, one half of the population. Ask the children and the parents, another third of the population. Then ask your friends." I said, "There aren't many like you." The fact that there are lines, well, we can only fight such barbarism with barbaric methods.

Streshnev: Did you convince him?

Shirokov: No, come on, can you convince a wino? But it's not just the wino who is hard to convince.

Streshnev: Well how will it be? I ask you. How can you forbid them from drinking even a drop at a wake or a wedding? Do you really think the people will go along with this? They will find any loophole to drink and there's nothing we can do about it.

Shirokov: And there's also the problem of consumption. Nowhere else in the world is there such a high incidence of alcoholism. We need more clubs, cafes, dancing halls, 1,000 new movie theaters and parks. What's a little beer or a glass of champagne? Why not, if it's in a civilized, human way? But this is for later on. Right now, if we don't take stern measures to fight alcoholism, everything will be back to where it was. We have to sell cars on credit, motorcycles, small country houses, everything at a fair price, so that people will spend less on vodka.

Streshnev: Oh Vasily, this won't be easy. Fighting alcoholism is a difficult and thankless task. We won't make ourselves popular in this either.

Shirokov: This isn't the concern. We lack the civilized basics. Let's take, for example, the fact that all over Europe thousands of young people hitch rides. They stick out their thumb and get driven to another city or to another country. Why do we treat ourselves worse? I've seen how old women and mothers with their children stand on the road waving at trucks as they roll by, empty by the way. I stopped one of them and

asked, "Why don't you take the children?" "Its not allowed," he said, "that's profiteering." "Well," I told him, "then give them a free ride." He replied, "I would but no one would believe that I did it for free." So let him take a rubic for this. It's on his way. And the people will benefit. Really, why not allow owners of private cars to give people lifts at a fixed rate. Let them take out a license, pay a tax... there are millions of autos. Let's allow it.

Streshnev: There's no reason to drag on about this, the old woman, the children. When the wood is chopped woodchips fly.

Shirokov: So that's it! Chips. That gardener is a chip. The old women are chips. The children are also chips, cogs, bolts. GOSPLAN does calculations by the millions. But where does it see the real problems, the real people? That there are no socks, no razorblades, no towels, no building supplies, no transportation. To see what the individual lacks. And for how long will this go on? From where did it, all this indifference toward people, come? Is it a product of our time? Was it the time that brought out and cultivated selfishness and a mercenary spirit, jubilees, handouts; first come, first served; with the more brazen ones swallowing greedily and ending up with titles, bonuses, awards, apartments and dachas for their relatives, and trips to decadent foreign countries for their children. Why bother the chiefs with the problems? They weren't reported, nothing was written up as though the problems didn't exist.

Streshnev: I'll speak frankly on this. One must talk less and do more.

Shirokov: Okay we got together to talk at the right time. Let's talk about the most important thing. How are we going to boost the oblast? Look you've been sitting in this job a long time and have had more contact with this.

Streshnev: I think, first of all, it will be necessary to impose discipline and stricter exactingness including expulsions. Then matters will improve.

Shirokov: So that's why you attacked the gorispolkom chairman, saying, "I'll chase you out of the party. You'll have to give up your party membership card."

Streshnev: Is that what you thought? We talk and talk about restructuring, but I can't make any sense out of it at all. What do they want from me? Do I have to turn myself inside out or what? The way I understand it is that we must step up exactingness, no matter who is involved. Whoever you are--an ispolkom chairman, a raykon secretary or a combine director, you'll be held strictly responsible. Isn't that so? Who is to blame for the excesses? Who is responsible for supplies? The chairman is!



Shirokov: And you, you and me, are we just on the sidelines?

Shreshnev: What do you mean, just on the sidelines? I used to be home by nine o'clock. Now it is not before 10 and sometimes even 11, and I never had a Saturday free.

Shirokov: Has there been much benefit from all that sitting in the office?

Shreshnev: It depends on how you look at it! After all, I don't just play games in the office! And, to come back to the point about the chairman, it is high time he was replaced. He did nothing but dance around the former first secretary. His deputy is another matter. He's an independent fellow!

Shirokov: We should look into this closely. As the saying goes, look before you leap. Cadres are the first thing! So we won't play the leapfrog game. As for who danced around whom? The first secretary chose people of his own ilk.

Shreshnev: Well, I was recommended by Moscow. You didn't want to return here after defending your thesis, so I had to bear the burden alone.

Shirokov: That's right, I had no desire to work with him.

Shreshnev: Tell me truthfully, Vasiliy, were you hindered? You walked around offended, I think for about 10 years, irritated over everything we were doing.

Shirokov: It's possible that I was hindered. I built up not irritations, but thirst. A thirst for work, to make decisions. The oblast chieftains sit around here.

Shreshnev: Come on, so you're also blaming the leaders. They solved something. They were anxious about matters, state matters. But I'm not going into this. Just imagine what it was like for me working under the first secretary, an illiterate fellow who finished the cooperative technical school. But he was sly. A real possum. As the saying goes, "If I'm the chief, you're the fool; if you're the chief, I'm the fool." So I went around as the fool with a smile on my face. I had to twist and turn in order to...

Shirokov: To lessen the impact. Everyone is well aware what things were like for you under him. Why did he put you up for a prize? Out of the kindness of his heart?

Shreshnev: You're reproaching me needlessly. I was not after the prize. The plant submitted my name. I worked with the metallurgical design bureau on the development. I published a brochure.



Shirokov: Everyone knows about your brochure. Twenty years later people are laughing--four 5-Year plan periods after he left production. Come on, who are we kidding, Ivan Petrovich? What's a prize received in such a fashion worth? Our party honor is valuable. We are in the people's eyes. They see everything and pass judgment on everything, especially on us, party workers. One or two wrong steps and you've undermined trust. Both in you and in the obkom.

Streshnev: Well, why were you dead set against publicity? There was no self-criticism. It had been suppressed. Decisionmaking was done behind closed doors. How did the people understand it? As a signal to attack me, that's how! You heard my speeches. It's on me that you're turning all this publicity. So what's new? It happens this way every time. A new leader comes to the oblast and the old one is raked over the coals. The people got used to this a long time ago. It's called the new broom. It's easy to be against an old leader, but are you ready to allow such publicity against yourself?

Shirokov: If I'm not ready, life will teach me. I am no Solomon, either. But here I don't see anything to be afraid of personally.

Streshnev: There's nothing to be afraid of, of course. Names will never hurt you. But organizational decisions are made immediately. That's what's frightening. You did the same with me. "At his own request." Maybe this was not "at my own request." Did you ask me? So a new wave is coming, but it's not the first, nor the last. These waves come and go. You and I have seen enough of them.

Shirokov: We must work together, but how can we if you cling tooth and nail to the old ways?

Streshnev: I'm clinging tooth and nail? I worked compatibly with the first secretary. Will I not get along with you? What are you saying? You can always rely on me.

Shirokov: I would rely on you, only... you were palming the deputy ispolkom chairman off on me. I wager he too is trying to ingratiate himself with you. I've heard you two are very chummy. You go hunting and fishing together.

Streshnev: Those busybodies. Now you listen to me! What has hunting to do with it? Who should be promoted if not the deputies? They've been educated, they've accumulated experience. Some of them have been in the same post for a long time, and yet they still continue to carry the entire burden. Who else, if not they?

Shirokov: I'm not convinced that they are the only ones. This matter must be given some serious thought to decide who is worth what. Not every first secretary ran the risk of placing a strong personality under himself. You haven't forgotten how cadres were selected in the oblast? Of course, there were quite a few intelligent people among the old workers. They

should naturally be given the green light. However, they work only up to 20 percent of their capacity. Remember, we always feared the talented ones. But there was one not easy to get along with, another not a manager type, one obstinate, one arrogant. It's the ordinary ones who get promoted, the ones who conform and who won't make waves.

Streshnev: Does this mean you're going to carry out a cadres shakeup. Do I understand you correctly?

Shirokov: Not a shakeup. So you've dug up a word from the old party history! A shakeup is a meaningless switch. What we need are people who look at work in a new way.

Streshnev: And what does "in a new way" mean?

Shirokov: Let's look at the tradition of "in a new way." Restructuring begins from the time that an individual examines his personal resources: spiritual, moral and political.

Streshnev: It's all somehow rather vague. Take me, for example, how should I restructure myself? I've never taken any bribes in my life. I've refused not only marketable souvenirs but also Japanese radios. I'll go to the store myself. So, if I can't get my daughter into the institute, okay, I won't. Issue permits to all dacha owners, fine, anytime. Then will you approve of me, or will you still find something in me that needs restructuring?

Shirokov: Stop seeking hidden meanings, don't needle me, Ivan. We're involved in matters of common concern. Yes, you have become inflexible. And at the academy you were a first-class fellow. A carousing, fun-loving chap. Yes, see how our lives pass us by.

Streshnev: But it really rolled along at that time. You were also different. You had a taste for putting on airs then too. Well maybe I'm embellishing a bit.

Shirokov: Well if...

Streshnev: Seriously though, how do you understand restructuring? What does it mean to you?

Shirokov: I've already explained it at length, what more can I say?

Streshnev: You're always down on me as though I alone represent the old style. You stated sharply at the bureau session that it will be necessary to replace all who stand in the way of restructuring. Does this mean then that as soon as you get me out of the way the new style will triumph? That's the extent of the renewal--it used to be Ivan's style and now it will be Vasiliy's. It looks as though I used the prosecutor and the former ispolkom chairman to get out of trouble and you use me. Is there a difference?

Shirokov: Of course there's a difference. You are an obkom secretary. Restructuring, accelerating, the party doesn't use these words lightly. They are addressed primarily to us, to you and me, to party workers. If we get down to work, there will be restructuring. If we don't, it'll just be words. What I've seen here is a wall. One can't get around this wall. It will have to be destroyed.

Streshnev: To destroy is not to build. It's easy to destroy. But you still haven't answered me about style. Take both of us, for example. We did party work together, studied at the same academy. What was it that you understood? What was it I failed to realize?

Shirokov: The question you raise is not simple. There is no immediate answer. Well, in the first place, I understood that the new style will have to be fought for. Resistance will have to be overcome.

Streshnev: Is it my resistance? Is it I who am resisting? For heaven's sake, in 20 years of party work I've gotten used to strictly carrying out any instructions. But in order to carry them out, you must understand what specifically has to be done, and how to work in the future. That's the hitch! I'm not alone in this. You've heard the leaders' speeches. There are many who don't understand.

Shirokov: They don't understand or don't want to? Because they would have to transform themselves, a most difficult thing to do. What else did I realize? Perhaps the main point is that we must strive for results from the worker, the scientist and the party secretary. And we must promote people responsibly, not for past services, ceremonious titles, but for their contribution today to a common cause.

Streshnev: These are all declarations. Say it more simply to make it easier for me, a fool, to understand.

Shirokov: You say you're a fool? But you're more cunning than I. Let's take our party worker. How do they encourage us? For the 5-year plan it's clear. Let's say for length of service. Say he's reached 50, let's say any age for that matter so that no one will be offended. Let the worker receive his due. We don't all work the same way. The results vary and that is the heart of the problem. For what are we paid? Why are we rewarded? For rank, grade, position, responsibility or for results?

Streshnev: Well I think it's for both reasons.

Shirokov: True, but at the same time give more weight to results and appreciate real quality. But there's still a problem here. Let's say the worker doesn't finish his work. Then the state doesn't pay him in full. What we have is a vicious cycle. Until the worker labors more intensively the state can't pay him more and vice versa. And you know what else? This concerns us both as leaders. One must put an end to extraordinary methods, orders, instructions and downright bureaucratic

administration. People were called to obkom bureau sessions. They worked steadily and made headway. That was how it was for many years, even for many decades. It's possible that there was no other way. The times were extraordinary--the Civil War, then industrialization by extraordinary methods, then collectivization and finally the Great Patriotic War. Here everything was at stake. Many years have passed, but we have not rid ourselves of these extraordinary measures--sowing and harvest campaigns with students, school kids, and scientists in the fields; rush work at enterprises for the last 10 days of the month; and endless confusion regarding supplies.

Streshnev: I want to add something else. Much has been built on deception, on distortion and on formal replies. When I arrived here, I too wanted to establish order, Vasya, but later I understood that here you'll barely scratch the surface! Take our leading sovkhoz, for example, famous all over the country. People came from all over to acquire experience from it, the pride of the oblast! But in reality this concept was false. Hundreds of hectares of land were concealed to boost yields. And orders, banners and honors were received for this. What was to be done? I started fighting it. But the first secretary made me see the light. Do you want to strike a blow against the entire oblast while the neighbors boast of successes and overfulfillments? That's when I realized that the system cannot be moved. You cause a stir, break up a few things, disrupt a few lives. Then you'll cool down, and everything will settle back into the old routine. So let's move as we've always done, gradually picking up speed.

Shirokov: No, it won't work. Time won't give us this chance. Haven't you heard? Either we rush forward, or we'll be left behind and crushed. What's happening in Brazil, India and China? Until we are pushed by advanced technology in the oblast, our people will look at their own cars with disappointment. Afterwards foreign cars won't measure up to them. Have you seen the Japanese in Moscow and the technology they are presenting?

Streshnev: How could I not have seen it? No question about it. But what levers can we use to accomplish this? What leadership methods are necessary?

Shirolov: Yes, everything must be built not on orders and commands but on interest, on respect, on an ambitious, economic attitude of people towards their work. Economic self-management, the most comprehensive, broadest possibility must be tried out. Here the most likely basic types are brigades, father and son and family contracts. And, if need be, there is individual labor. All types are good. Except for the inefficient kinds.

Streshnev: It's risky, Vasilii. We could turn in the wrong direction.

Shirokov: But where are we headed now? Risks have to be taken. Don't go into the forest if you're afraid of wolves. For us, it's not just going into the forest. We have to reach the highest first-class standard

of technology and affect the lives of the people. Indifferent bureaucrats will not give us any security. They won't open new avenues. While I was on vacation, I sat down and reread Lenin. Not everything, of course, but his last works. You know, I was struck by how abruptly he changed after "War Communism." He revised the entire concept of socialism. For example, institute the cooperative system not only in the countryside, which is an error, but in the cities as well. How to make the cooperative a form of self-management? Just listen to what public opinion is saying about theater directors; about self-financing; about moviemaking associations; about Voznesenskiy, the poet; about cooperative publishing houses; about financially autonomous sports clubs. In short, economic self-management is knocking from all sides.

Streshnev: Is this cooperative socialism?

Shirokov: Why cooperative? It's self-financing, self-managing. The cooperative is only a small portion of the vast economy being transferred over to self-management. Of course, the bureaucrats don't relish this prospect. They'll have to share their power and authority.

Streshnev: So I've fallen in with the bureaucrats. I find all this very strange. Maybe I really have been a stick-in-the-mud in some respects. Maybe I've become bogged down in petty routine, in resolutions, in making speeches. The meat plan, the milk plan, refrigerators, cement! You have to make time for everything, watch everything. You know there is no time for reflection especially on such important problems.

Shirokov: I feel sorry for you. An obkom must think on a grand scale, about perspectives, about its region's development, and, most importantly, about its actual results.

Streshnev: But a result is not achieved at any price. Problems must be solved through governmental bodies, and to return to the cooperative methods, especially to individual labor, is a retreat from our achievements.

Shirokov: A retreat? From where?

Streshnev: From our principles.

Shirokov: And where did you find these principles?

Streshnev: What do you mean, where? They are an elementary truth of Marxism.

Shirokov: Elementary? Then find it for me. Show me the volume and page in the works of Marx or Lenin. You see we've got this idea that everything done by the state is good and that everything done in society privately is bad. The state drives you around in a car, uses up gasoline and pays your personal driver. This is all good, but if you personally sit behind the wheel, this is bad, suspicious. If I were to buy some state potatoes



from a state trade enterprise, this would be alright. But nice new fresh ones from a market gardner would be wrong. We cannot find these thoughts in Lenin. Let me tell you, we were taught the wrong thing at the academy by Baroptarlo, our political economics professor. He fed us quotations from the "War Communism" times--rationing, direct confiscations, prohibitions, enthusiasm without material interest. As for private trade exchanges, money and value, these were excuses for labor, nothing but abberations of capitalism. He hid a very simple truth from us. That Lenin himself did not stand still but accumulated new ideas from life's experience.

Streshnev: So you mean to tell me you've discovered a new Lenin?

Shirokov: Wipe that grin off your face. It was not I but the 27th Congress. The party restored our understanding of many of Ilich's most important behests. The time for a command economy has passed...

Streshnev: What do you mean by command economy?

Shirokov: Well, how did Peter the First develop the economy? By decrees. He issued a decree: Cast iron and make guns! And so they started casting iron and making guns. This might have been quite appropriate for the time. But 300 years have gone by, and we simply are unable to rid ourselves of this psychology. It's shameful. Working under such patriarchal methods is shameful and inefficient. The party has clearly stated that reforms are necessary, but precisely what kinds? Much experimenting and thinking lies ahead.

Streshnev: That's a matter for Moscow. They'll tell us and we'll do it. They'll pass new laws and we'll implement them.

Shirokov: So we're the executors. That's how you understand party work.

Streshnev: And what about you?

Shirokov: I understand it differently. The obkom party secretary is a representative, not a bureaucrat. A representative is an individual who is ready to move even in another direction for the sake of a cause.

Streshnev: You know about something that I still don't comprehend, Vasiliy. You speak about self-management, independence. So what will be the obkom's role? The role of the obkoms and raykoms? Does that mean we will detach ourselves from the main economic and social issues of life? And will we delegate everything to other governemnt bodies? Then what will our guiding role be?

Shirokov: What are you saying? We'll detach ourselves? I see, there's something I must have missed here. On the contrary, then we'll decide the most important issues through the party organizations. We'll make political policy through communists in each link. I would coordinate



activities in all management links in the promotions of capable individuals. In education, training and propaganda there's plenty to do. The most important thing is social justice and democracy. It is primarily for this that our people carried out the revolution and endured every ordeal. We must not simply repeat that there can be no socialism without democracy, but must put this into practice throughout our lives. There will be little point if there is restructuring only among us, the leadership link. What is needed is restructuring for everyone. Then there will be no turning back.

Streshnev: Well, Vasiliy, I want to be candid with you, as with a friend. Only don't get upset. All this you describe is a utopia. It's a flimsy notion, nothing will come of it, absolutely nothing I tell you.

Shirokov: Why not?

Streshnev: It's a simple argument. This is the third time I can recall in our lives that we've tackled these questions. The first time was after Stalin's death. Do you remember? We were students then. We spoke of nothing but reforms, democracy and social self-management. What happened? The second time was in 1965, when the Central Committee special plenum announced approval of economic reforms. Again nothing came of it. Everything disappeared as though it had never existed. Why? That's something to really think about. Why? I believe that all of this contradicts our system, the will of the apparatus and the consciousness of the people, whether you call it patriarchal or egalitarian. Remember Nikolay Voznesenskiy, the Gosplan chairman at the beginning of the fifties? He wanted to use new methods. How did it all end? Not only did he lose his post but also his head.

Shirokov: Have you up to now been living in fear? Are you frightening us, or do you fear Voznesenskiy's fate? Then, if you had been first...

Streshnev: What are you saying, Vasiliy? I'm giving an example.

Shirokov: Well, so what's the conclusion you draw from these examples?

Streshnev: This is not our way. It contradicts the whole system.

Shirokov: So that's your opinion, not our way. But this is what I think. The fact that we have already attempted reforms several times proves their inevitability. Earlier there wasn't enough boldness or political will. Now, the will exists, and the main thing is that the society now is not what it was then. Educated energetic people crave to work and live in a new way. The apparatus is also not the same. When has it been more competent and more demanding of itself? Contradictions, you say, but what contradicts what? That is the question. Your methods are contradictions, and you present them as methods for the entire system. Don't frighten us, Ivan, don't frighten us. The time for fear has gone. The time for intensive and honest work has come. I had a phone call from Moscow. I was told that you had asked to be moved to a different oblast. Is that true, Ivan Petrovich?

Streshnev: There was an opportunity, but I didn't put it like that. I just put out feelers.

Shirokov: Well, this simplifies things. So perhaps we'll have to go our separate ways and not at your request. You and I can't work together as a team. We can't. Therefore, let's inform the Central Committee.

Streshnev: Then I'll tell you one final thing, Vasiliy. It's still not clear whose side will win.

Shirokov: Well, thank goodness for that. You've taken a weight off my mind. I had my doubts. Am I treating my former friend properly? Now I see that I am. It is not I, but time that has presented you with its harsh account.

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~~21~~ MARCH, 1987

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